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Author(s): Berthold Laufer

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## SOME FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS OF CHINESE CULTURE

*By Berthold Laufer, Ph.D., Associate Curator of Asiatic Ethnology, Field Museum, Chicago*

Of all the numerous problems with which the scientific research of China is concerned, the problem of the early origin and development of Chinese civilization is the most important, and at the same time the most fascinating. In former times, when the exploration of China was still in its infancy, two main theories, in strong contrast with each other, were advanced in regard to the origin of the Chinese. In the eighteenth century, when both China and Egypt were imperfectly known, it was almost inevitable that the two should be linked together by a common source of origin; and in more recent times the romantic school of sinologues, headed by T. de Lacouperie, stamped the Chinese as emigrants from Babylonia, bringing from there all the essential elements of West-Asiatic civilization. The French Count Gobineau is responsible for the not very serious hypothesis that the culture of China in its total range may have been derived from India. Other scholars endowed with a lesser degree of imaginative power insisted on the independence and originality of Chinese culture, and vigorously stood on the platform of a Monroe doctrine, "China for the Chinese." But this theory of perfect seclusion and isolation of ancient Chinese culture can no longer be upheld; for we begin to recognize more and more its historic and prehistoric connection with other culture-groups of Asia, and to understand that also the Chinese were a people among peoples.

Indeed, no culture on this globe was ever exclusive or singled out, or had a purely internal development prompted by factors wholly within itself. The growth and diffusion of culture are due to historical agencies, and must be

comprehended in connection with the universal history of mankind. No historical problem can be understood and solved with any hope of success by limiting the attention to one particular culture-sphere to the exclusion of all others, and even in the minutest specialization of our work we must never be forgetful of the universalistic standpoint. Aside from the lack of critical methods, the principal error of those who simply reduced Chinese culture to a loan received from the west, was that the antiquity of the fundamental elements of civilization was far undervalued, and that a purely imaginary drama of migration of tribes was staged which has no basis in fact. Beyond any doubt, the foundations of civilization are far older than the period to which the oldest extant documents of the Egyptians, Sumerians, and Chinese, carry us back; and the impression even prevails at present that they are still older than we are now inclined to assume on the ground of archaeological facts and internal evidence. The acquisition of cultivated plants, their wide distribution over immense geographical areas in Asia and Europe, the introduction of agriculture, the domestication of animals, the mining and working of metals, the conception of the important technical inventions, in order to come into being, must have taken, even within the boundary of reasonable calculation, not centuries but millenniums of human labor and exertion, and are removed far beyond the bounds of all historical remembrance. As to the question of migrations, it is not tribes but the very ideas of culture which have constantly been on the path of migration, which were transmitted from people to people and fertilized and advanced the life of nations. In the earliest records of the Chinese we meet no tradition pointing to an immigration from abroad. All that the conservative historian may safely assert is, that they inaugurated their career in the fertile valley of the middle and lower course of the Yellow River and its affluents, and gradually expanded from this centre of their early habitat eastward toward Chili and Shantung, and in a southerly direction toward the Yangtse. In their onward march they encountered a large stock of an aboriginal population of most varied tribes,

partly related to them in language, with whom they struggled many centuries for the supremacy in China. The comparative study of Indo-Chinese languages has brought out the fact that the Chinese are a member of an extensive family of peoples, the best-known representatives of which are the Siamese, the Burmese, and the Tibetans. In early historical times all these peoples lived in close proximity to and relationship with the Chinese, in the western and southwestern part of China; and we are able to trace from their records and tradition the history of their migrations into the countries which they now occupy. The Tibetans designate themselves Bod (Sanskrit Bhota), and Ptolemy knows them by the name Bautai inhabiting the river Bautisos, identified with the Upper Yellow River. The present territory of Western Kansu and Szechuan was the cradle of the Tibetan branch which moved from there westward into the present territory of Tibet, probably during the first centuries of our era. The province of Yünnan is the home of the forefathers of the modern Siamese formerly known as Shan or Ai-lao (the modern Laos), who formed the highly organized kingdom of Nan-chao. Their state was destroyed by the Mongols in 1252, and the Mongol invasion gave the incentive to an emigration of the Shan from Yünnan down into the peninsula, where they founded the Kingdom of Siam in about 1350.

In the extreme southeast of Asia, scattered over the mountains and littorals of Indo-China, we meet another large group of peoples whose languages show no affinities with Chinese, and who form a distinct family. The most prominent members of this stock are the Annamese, the Khmer of Cambodja, the Mon of Pegu in the delta of the Irawaddy, the Khasi, and the Colarians, whose remnants are dispersed over the hill tracts of Central India. In prehistoric times this group extended also into southern China, and it is due to the expansion of the Chinese that they were subsequently driven back farther toward the south. These ethnical movements render it clear that the present Chinese territory is in the main composed of two distinct culture-areas,—a northern one, decidedly Chinese;

and a southern one, originally non-Chinese, but later colonized, absorbed by and assimilated to Chinese rule. Present-day China is a political, not a national or ethnical unit. The antagonism that still prevails between the people of northern and southern China, and which nearly resulted in a partition of the country during the recent revolution, has come to the notice of everybody. It amounts not only to a question of racial differences, but to a far-reaching divergence of culture and economy as well. The farmer of the north grows wheat, barley, and various species of millet, and tills the ground with the ox as the draught-animal of his plough. The south is engaged in the cultivation of rice, and the peasant avails himself of the water-buffalo, an animal domesticated in south-eastern Asia. His method of farming, corresponding to the subtropical flora characterized by palms, evergreen shrubs, fragrant woods, and tropical fruits, consists essentially in gardening, where that primitive system of hoe-culture still partially survives in which not the plough, but only the hoe, is employed. The north is traversed by highways, and the two-wheeled cart drawn by mules is the usual means of conveyance; besides, the horse, the donkey, the camel, are in evidence as pack-animals and for riding. The south is densely intersected by rivers and a net of skilfully laid out canals connecting rivers and lakes, so that boats are the favorite method of journeying and transporting goods; on land, the sedan-chair carried on the shoulders of bearers is the means of transportation, whereas horses and mules are almost absent or scarce. The northerners are typical children of the soil, conservative, and somewhat heavy; the southerners, more alert and quick tempered, are sons of the watery element, river boatmen, bold seafarers, enterprising merchants, emigrants and colonists. The Chinese, of course, are by origin a purely continental race; and one of the most attractive chapters of their history is the one telling how they gradually extended from their inland seats toward the sea-coast, how their naïve astonishment at the grandeur of the ocean produced a marine mythology and legends of

distant lands and blessed isles, and how they learned and acquired the art of navigating from the seafaring nations along the shores of Indo-China. The north, in close contact with central and northern Asia, was constantly engaged in perpetual defensive wars against the restless hordes of Turkish and Tungusian nomads, and subject to influences coming from that direction; the horse, the donkey, the camel, the tactics of mounted archers and cavalry, felt and rug weaving, are due to this contact. The south was always deeply influenced by currents of thought pouring in from Malayan and Indian regions, and still visible in the laying-out of settlements, in domestic architecture, in everyday implements, and in certain industries and products.

The knowledge of the geographical distribution of such culture-elements as are here pointed out is naturally the basis for the understanding of their origin and historical development. For this reason let us now turn our attention to that northern culture-province which represents the original culture of the Chinese, and which was subsequently welded with the south into that unit which is now included under the name "China." The main question to be raised is, What relation did that culture hold to the other cultures of Asia? When we attempt to reconstruct by comparative and intense methods the oldest accessible primeval forms of the ancient civilizations of Asia, we are ultimately led to the result that in an undefinable prehistoric age a great universal and uniform culture-type must have existed in the northern or central hemisphere of the Old World, in strong contrast with the cultures of all primitive tribes which we encounter in the rest of Asia, in Africa, and in America. In the earliest stages of Sumero-Babylonian, Indo-Iranian, and Chinese cultures leaving aside the manifold subsequent differentiations due to indigenous development, we are confronted with a number of traits which most strikingly coincide, and which cannot be attributed to a chance accident. Conspicuous among these is the economic system of the three peoples, which was founded in like manner on agriculture and cattle-breeding; that is to say, it was then already on the same

basis as our modern system of economy. Their agricultural implements were highly developed, they tilled their fields by means of the plough drawn by an ox that was regarded as a sacred animal, and cultivated several cereals, chiefly wheat and barley. Methods of artificial irrigation were perfectly known, and elaborate agrarian laws were in force. Cattle were exclusively employed as draught-animals, particularly in connection with the plough, and were originally raised, not for their milk, but for their meat only. Carts and chariots built on the principle of the wheel are found alike in the three groups; while it is a notable fact that transportation by means of wheels is obviously absent with all primitive tribes of Asia, Africa (except ancient Egypt), in the South Sea, Australia, and America. It is remarkable also that the cart appears everywhere hand in hand with the plough, and consequently must be an invention made in the agricultural stage of civilization. The peoples of Babylonia, India, and China, in the same manner, employed chariots for making war, to which horses were harnessed. As the ox was domesticated in the interest of agriculture, the camel in the interest of commerce, so the horse was essentially an animal of war, and in its military capacity was employed as the draught-animal of war-chariots. Horseback-riding is a much later art conceived by the nomadic tribes of Scythia and inner Asia. Of other domestic animals, dog and swine were reared. As to the importance of swine, ancient China offers a striking analogy to the prehistoric cultures of central Europe, with which it has also millet and the water-chestnut in common. The offensive arm of that period was the composite bow,—a very complex affair, consisting principally of flexible wood combined with horn, to which are bound layer upon layer of pliable sinew,—while most of the primitive tribes of Asia know only the simple wooden bow. Of metals, only copper and bronze were employed. In the manufacture of ceramics, the potter's wheel has been utilized since early times in the East as well as in the West. Homer, in a verse of the *Iliad* (XVIII, 600), compares the movements in the round of a dance to the whirling



motion of the disk turned by the potter's hand. The ancient Chinese philosophers likened the action of Heaven in evolving the universe and its beings to a potter fashioning the objects of clay by the revolution of his wheel; and Heaven, for his creative power, is directly styled a moulder or a potter's wheel. Again, this contrivance is unknown wherever pottery is worked in the primitive stages of culture. Furthermore, we find in ancient Babylonia and China a highly-developed stage of knowledge of astronomy combined with an intelligent chronological sense, time-reckoning, and a calendar system.

The time and locality in which this reconstructed primeval culture common to Western Asia, India, and China, was developed, certainly escape our knowledge, and I must forbear on this occasion discussing this side of the problem. The point which should be emphasized is, that the characteristic features, particularly the system of economy, are fundamental principles and factors of civilization, and exactly those which still form the fundament of our own modern life. We still depend for our subsistence, in the same manner as the prehistoric culture-groups of Asia did ages ago, upon the products of the soil, the cultivation of cereals, the breeding of cattle; and in principle, our methods of farming, despite all technical improvements, are still the same. We may reform almost everything in our life; we may change our language, our manners and customs, our political institutions, or our philosophy; but we cannot change that one most stable and persistent factor of our culture which we may briefly sum up in the words "cereals," "cattle," "plough," and "wheel." Whatever our modern progress in the perfection of land transportation may be, whether we consider our steam-engines or motor-cars, they all depend upon the basic principle of the wheel,—that wonderful invention of prehistoric days, of the time, place, and author of which we are ignorant.

The main contribution, however, to the problem under consideration, is that ancient Chinese culture in its earliest stage cannot be the product of an isolated seclusion, but



has its due share and its root in the same fundamental ideas as go to build up the general type of Asiatic-European civilization. This opinion certainly does not imply that the basis of primeval Chinese culture is merely derived from the West, but only that it has a substratum of ideas to be met alike in the other great culture-groups of Asia from which we may reconstruct the common ancestral form of culture that must have once prevailed in most ancient times.

While, thus, the place of China is determined in the general history of civilization, there are, on the other hand, visible symptoms in existence which warrant the belief that as early as prehistoric times the Chinese must have undergone a development during several thousands of years entirely independent of any Western influence. And here we touch on one of the most interesting problems in the oldest history of Asia. Ancient Asia with its European annex is split into two large, sharply-defined economic camps, as regards the production and consumption of milk and other dairy products. The entire East-Asiatic world, inclusive of China, Korea, Japan, Indo-China, and all Malaysians, does not take animal milk for food, and evinces a deep-rooted aversion toward it; and this was the state of affairs even in remotest times. On the other hand, all Indo-European peoples, the Semites, the ancient Scythians, and all nomadic tribes of northern and central Asia, as Turks, Mongols, and Tibetans, are all milk-drinkers, and were so in early historical times. The remarkable feature about this case certainly is not the bare fact that the East-Asiatics abstain from milk,—for the aboriginal tribes of America and Australia and others, simply for the lack of milk-producing animals, do exactly the same,—but the essential point is that the Chinese and their followers adhere to this practice, despite an abundance of milk-furnishing domestic animals in their possession, and despite long-enduring intercourse with neighboring milk-consuming peoples, whose habits and mode of life were very familiar to them. They rear cows, buffalo, mares, camels, sheep, goats, all animals from which milk could be derived, but

they do not even understand how to milk them. They were at all times surrounded by Turkish and Mongol peoples, whose daily sustenance depends upon milk and kumiss, butter and cheese. This fact has been perfectly known to the Chinese, but, notwithstanding, they never acquired the habit. In India and Indo-China we face the same striking fact, in that the aboriginal inhabitants, though willing to submit to the higher civilization of the Aryan Hindu, never adopted from them the custom of milk-drinking. It follows, therefore, that our consumption of animal milk cannot be looked upon as a self-evident and spontaneous phenomenon, for which it has long been taken, but that it is a mere matter of educated force of habit. As natural as it appears to us, owing to time-honored practice and tradition, so just as unnatural, tedious, and barbarous does it strike the Chinese and other peoples of eastern Asia, who uphold that it is cruel to deprive the calf of its mother's milk. This ethical opinion, surely, does not give the true reason for their abstinence from milk, but is no more than a speculative after-thought. No less remarkable is it that no religious taboo is placed on milk in any of the Eastern religions, and that the aversion is not prompted by motives of any religious character; it is purely a matter of social and economic life. Thus we are led to distinguish in the history of the domestication of cattle two main and fundamental stages. In the primary stage, the milking faculty of the cow was unknown to man, and the ox was exclusively the sacred animal of agriculture, drawing the plough; and the invention of the plough and the cultivation of cereals are events closely affiliated with the taming of the ox. This is the very point which Chinese society has in common with the rest of Asia and Europe. At the close of this initial period, the western portion of the Old World subsequently advanced to a further stage of development, from which the Chinese were debarred,—the acquisition of dairy economy. This was an exceedingly complex, slow, and long process, moving along two lines,—one in the producer, the animal, in which the productive power was gradually trained; the other in the consumer,

man, who just as slowly acquired the habit of taking to milk. It should be understood that the obvious advantages which we derive from domesticated animals are not the reasons which prompted their domestication. These material advantages are but the effect and result of prolonged activity in matters of domestication, and could not have been anticipated by primitive man when he first conceived the idea of rearing and training animals. Wild fowl, e.g., when they are first being taken care of by man, do not propagate to a large extent, nor do they lay eggs in great numbers. The egg-laying habit of our chickens, to such an extent that it was of some advantage to man, was only attained in the course of the gradual process of domestication. Consequently other reasons than material considerations must have led to the first step in this direction. Likewise the productive power of our milk-animals is only the consequence and the ultimate result of long-continued domestication. This development, which must have been in operation for millenniums, ages before any recorded history, remained confined solely to the western part of Asia, while the East was never affected by this movement. This effect is still obvious in the division of labor brought about between cow and ox in the West, the ox performing duty as working-beast, the cow being the milk-animal. The same is reflected in language: all Semitic, Indo-European, and Ural-Altaic languages have separate words for "bull" and "cow," while the Chinese express the same notions with one word only.

There are other such negative criteria of peculiar character which conspire to prove a lengthy prehistoric period of Chinese independence. The ancient Chinese raised sheep and goats, but never utilized the wool of these animals for the making of material for clothing, as was done in the West. The employment of wool for felt and rugs is an idea of nomadic peoples of inner Asia, and was taught by them to the Chinese in historical times. The latter always used for their garments vegetable fibres obtained from various kinds of hemp, and silk, which most clearly stands out as a pre-eminently brilliant example of their

power of nature-observation and of their technical genius. The art of baking leavened bread, which was first applied by the Egyptians and adopted by the Greeks and Romans, has always remained unknown in China, where no leavening or fermenting agent is employed for bread-making.

Speaking of mental achievements, we observe that the Chinese, like all other peoples of eastern Asia, have never produced any epic poetry. Epic poems are met with among all Indo-European nations, among the Finno-Ugrians, the Turkish, Tibetan, Mongol, and Tungusian tribes; and it is a peculiar coincidence that all these peoples of epic songs are also milk-consumers, while those abstaining from milk are deficient in epic poems. I do not mean to say that there is an interrelation between milk and epics, but merely wish to point out the fact of this curious coincidence.

Thus the conviction is gaining ground, on the one hand, that Chinese culture, in its material and economic foundation, has a common root with our own; and, on the other hand, that it independently marched along its own way and evolved its own ideas for numberless ages, until at the time when the nation emerged from prehistoric life it had grown to full maturity. The keynote of its rapid progress in historical times is chiefly signalled by the sound development of all social and civic virtues, finally culminating in the political and ethical system expounded by the sage Confucius. The sane family organization based on the religious institution of ancestral worship, the high conception of the sacredness and purity of family life, filial devotion, and the subjection of the individual to the ideal of the family and the state, must be regarded as the principal manifestations accounting for the racial and national continuity of the Chinese, that indestructible vital power and tenacity of their culture and institutions. No nation has ever presented a more sensible and effectual solution of the problem of the sexes than China by her common-sense marriage-laws, which enjoin marriage on every one as a moral obligation due to the ancestors. Despite its religious function, it has always been strictly a matter of

civil law, and was never usurped by a Church or bound to ecclesiastic sanctions, as has so long been the case among ourselves. Early marriages were always made possible in consequence of a just economic system, with an almost equal distribution of landed property among single owners, in which a large, probably the largest, portion of the population, enjoys a share; while great real-estate owners are few, resulting in a levelling process of economic and social equality. Husbandry was at all times upheld as the bone and sinew of society, and encouraged and promoted by Government. In the social division the farmer ranks next to the scholar or official, and precedes the laborer and merchant. Wholesome principles in matters of nutrition, frugality, and temperance—in general, a good share in the knowledge of that greatest of all arts, the art of living—have contributed to the stability and persistency of Chinese society. An extraordinary capability for passive resistance, and an unlimited power of absorption, are prominent characteristics of this civilization, whose vitality has been tested many times. Military defeats and even widespread conquests have never been able to make a deep impression on this people. By dint of intellectual force and superior diplomatic tactics they have usually overcome the most serious conditions. The Huns could overrun Europe; but the very same Huns, knocking at the gates of China for many centuries, were unable to bring about her downfall. The Mongols trampled the Occident under the feet of their horses; but under their sway in China they became converted into Chinese, and made art, literature, and commerce flourish. In the same manner they absorbed the Khitan, the Manchu, and others of their foreign rulers.

We are all familiar with the fact that we are indebted to the inventive genius of the Chinese for the mariner's compass, gunpowder, fire-works, rag-paper, wall-paper, paper money, silk, porcelain, the goldfish, tea and many other valuable cultivated plants. All these things, being exceedingly useful and practical, come within the daily reach and experience of every one. They have also en-

riched the field of our popular games and entertainments by the addition of kite-flying, shuttlecock, playing-cards, dominoes, checkers, and that jolly theatrical performance the shadow-play. But all these advantages sink into insignificance when we come to consider the intellectual gain which has accrued to us from the wonderful development of the mental and moral forces alive in the Chinese nation. They follow suit with us in their eminently chronological and historical sense, one of their most striking and admirable intellectual traits. Next to the Greeks, they are that nation which has furnished the most solid and extensive contributions to our scientific knowledge. While ancient India revels in mythology but gives us no clew to her history, the Chinese have recorded for us with minute accuracy and painstaking conscientiousness, and above all with objective impartiality, every event in their internal history and in their relations with foreign peoples. The continuity of their traditions laid down in their twenty-four national Annals may be styled, more justly than many other things, one of the great wonders of the world, and this stupendous work is the most permanent monument that they have built to themselves. They are born philologists and students, and there is no domain of human thought which their fertile literature has not efficiently cultivated.

While the knowledge of China which the Greeks and Romans possessed was vague and hazy, the Chinese have bequeathed to us invaluable notes on the conditions and commerce of the Roman Orient. Their generals, diplomats, and Buddhist pilgrims, who journeyed across Central Asia to India, or visited Korea, Japan, and the ports of the Indian Ocean, have proved as keen and trustworthy observers in the memoirs which they have jotted down on the geography, manners, and customs of foreign countries. But for the writings of many heroic Chinese explorers, we should still be groping in the dark as to the ancient history, topography, and archæology of India and Turkistan; and a serious study of India and Buddhism, as well as of Tibet and Mongolia, is no longer possible without the staff of sinology. The first Chinese traveller was the famous



General Chang K'ien, who in 138 B.C. started on a diplomatic mission to the west; he was held in captivity for ten years by the Hiung-nu, the ancestors of the Huns of Attila, and finally reached Ferghana and Bactria, advancing as far as the Oxus. In 126 B.C. he returned to his fatherland with the seeds of a number of new cultural plants, and submitted to his astounded countrymen a glowing account of the new world which he had discovered, and which was nothing less than the Hellenic-Iranian civilization inaugurated in those regions by the successors of Alexander the Great. He was the first Chinese who had learned, and brought the idea home, that behind the thick veil of roving nomads threatening the empire in the north and west, there were sedentary nations in the farthest west, of enormous wealth and civilized forms of government, with whom a profitable trade might be opened. The report of this undaunted pioneer left an indelible impression upon the minds of his countrymen. In 115 B.C. he set out again for his former goal, but died the next year from the fatigue of his journey. About two centuries afterwards, in A.D. 73, General Pan Ch'ao, after a struggle of sixteen years centring around Kashgar, established a protectorate over Central Asia, and heard people speak with much praise about a great empire in the west, Ta Ts'in; that is, the Roman possessions in anterior Asia. In 97 he commanded Kan Ying, an officer of his military staff, to proceed to Syria in search of this mysterious land. Kan Ying reached the shores of the Persian Gulf, where he was to embark on one of the boats circumnavigating Arabia, and sailing up into the Red Sea to the point from which the caravans started for Syria. There he was deterred from his plan by natives, who warned him of the perils of navigation—presumably on account of the jealousy of the Parthians, who were the middlemen in the silk trade between Serika, as the ancients called China, and the Roman Orient, and who may have feared lest the Chinese might open direct trade with Rome, if Kan Ying should have succeeded. There is ample food for reflection in speculating as to how far Chinese culture would have



been affected or modified by an immediate intercourse with the antique world. We may regret that it was deferred and that the seed first sown by Chang K'ien has reached fruition only in our day. A common tie links Chang K'ien, the first modern Chinese, with Kang You-wei, the reformer, though the two men are separated by a space of two thousand years. Chang K'ien was the first to experience, that, besides his own country, there was another great sunny world. The ancient Chinese doctrine of the State came to its climax in the axiom that China and her civilization were identical with the world, and represented the universal unlimited empire surrounded by barbarians. This political philosophy was maintained by the Government until recent times, when K'ang You-wei was the first to strike the death-blow to this theory, and to prove to his countrymen that it is the individual national State only which has a right of existence and a guaranty of enduring under modern conditions. Under the guidance of this fertile idea, the renaissance of the nation has taken place, and its national rejuvenation will doubtless result also in the reshaping of a new national culture.